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Title

Concussions have been the biggest talk in sports for the last couple of years. It has affected anyone who watches the sport or anyone who plays. From a player standpoint the rules are changing to make sure that you are protected and kept safe. This is done through having trainers better specialized to notice when a player has a concussion and how to deal with it when they do have one. Also the rules have changed so that players can be ejected from high school and college games for helmet-to-helmet hits. The NFL fines player for unnecessary hits. Protecting the players is a big priority in sports and it has affected the way the game is played.

RESEARCH AND BACKGROUND

Primary research

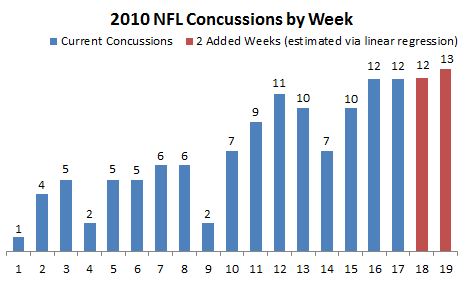
Three years ago the NFL created a rule that states that each team must have a private neurotrauma specialist to be on the sidelines. On top of that they have concussion doctors high above the field and one on the field. They are their to look for players who have concussion symptoms and try to take them out of the game before it gets too serious (Tedeschi).

In the 2015 season St. Louis Ram’s quarterback suffered a helmet-to-helmet hit that clearly affected him. After the hit he reached for his head and was unable to get up even with the help of a teammate. The team’s trainer checked on him and felt that he was okay to continue playing even though he clearly wasn’t. This injury came in the 4th quarter of a game that was tied with a little over a minute left to go. There is speculation that the team kept him in because he would help them win. Clearly they weren’t too concerned with his mental health (Wagoner).

In 2011 the Cleveland Brown’s quarterback Colt McCoy was almost knocked out by a vicious helmet-to-helmet hit from linebacker James Harrison. He was pretty much unconscious after the hit and was brought to the sideline and put back in the game two plays later. Brad McCoy said that Colt was “nauseated and didn’t know who he was” then he added that “they didn’t test him for a concussion on the sideline… he couldn’t face the lights in his press conference.” (Kxan) Clearly he had a concussion he had the symptoms after the hit and clearly after the game. Somehow the trainers felt that he was okay to come back in the game.

In 2014 University of Michigan quarterback Shane Morris took a big hit and when he got up he was stumbling and needed the help of his teammates just to stand up. Brady Hoke the coach of Michigan at the time felt that he didn’t need to take him out. After one pay he took out Morris. He came back to the sideline and wasn’t even evaluated for a concussion and was put back into the game after just three plays. He was barely able to even stand when he got back onto the field. It was clear to anyone watching including the announcers of the game who were disgusted by the fact that he was allowed back into the game. After the game Brady Hoke said that Morris wasn’t evaluated for a concussion due to poor communication on the sideline with the independent neurologist (DrewCHallett / CNN).

University of Wisconsin safety Michael Caputo was trying to tackle an Alabama player when he hit his head on his teammates hip and was knocked to the ground. He slowly got up and seemed to be okay. Then he lined up on the wrong side of the field with the Alabama players and the trainers quickly ran out and took him out of the game after realizing he was seriously injured. Players from both team yelled to the sidelines and referees to check on him and take him out of the game. The team’s medical staff announced that he wouldn’t return to the game due to a head injury (Stanislav St72).

In 2010 Eagles linebacker Stewart Bradley was trying to tackle a packers player when he went head first into a teammates hip. He was clearly struggling to get up but after got up he took a couple steps and then fell right back to the ground. He tried to get back up but teammates urged him to stay on the ground because they realized he was concussed. Players from both teams yelled to the training staff to come over and make sure that he was okay. The training staff went through the concussion protocol with him on the field and later helped him off the field. He didn’t return to the game (NFL). Later that game Eagles quarterback Kevin Kolb took a hard hit and was immediately removed from the game. 

(Pacific Northwest-Coast Bias) This graph shows how many concussions occurred weekly in the NFL during the 2010 season (this only shows the concussions that teams reported some that reported). It seems that for the most parts that concussions steadily increase during the season. Week two and week nine didn’t follow the pattern but that may be because they were during bye weeks for several teams. The increase is caused by players taking multiple little blows to their head, which add up and become the equivalent of one large hit to the head.

RESEARCH-METHODS AND FINDINGS

On April 4th, 2015 a federal judge approved a lawsuit filled by more than 5,000 retired players. They are dealing with symptoms that have been caused by concussions that went untreated during their professional career. The lawsuit will span over 65 years and will pay out over $900 million to the players (Mihoces, Axon). Concussions are becoming a very serious issue for the NFL and it’s starting to cost them.

One of the major controversies that happened recently was the retirement of 49ers linebacker Chris Borland. He was just 24 when he retired and had only played one season of professional football and had an amazing season. His retirement came as a shock to everyone. Worried about the long-term damages that football would do to his brain Chris Borland says, "If there were no possibility of brain damage, I'd still be playing." He later adds, “any statistic you see about concussions, is beneath the reality because players never tell anyone they’re concussed…people don’t really have the experience or knowledge to know differently. And when the NFL says that concussions are down 25% the average Joe or parents with kids playing football say, yeah, that’s great.” (Borland) He believes it’s impossible to know how many concussions have occurred since many players hide the fact that they have one so they don’t have to come out of the game. He also doesn’t trust the NFL because he believes the statistics are made up just to look better. After his retirement there was a strong belief that many players will start retiring early due to a fear of CTE (Fainaru).

After his retirement the NFL forced him to take a drug test because they wonted people to think he retired because he was actually on drugs not due to a fear of concussions. “I don’t want to be a conspiracy theorist, I just wanted to be sure,” (Borland). So he hired an independent company to also conduct a drug test on him. The results of both tests came back negative. If the results of the test came back positive this would be a much different story (Fainaru).

There is a strong belief that CTE takes a while to affect you and you wont die from it until you are older. Well that was proven wrong when New York Giants safety Tyler Sash passed away at age 27. He passed away due to a drug overdose and was found to have CTE. He had multiple concussions in his playing career and his brother Josh said that he suffered concussions while playing at the University of Iowa and even during high school (Red).

One of the major names in all professional football has always been O.J Simpson and he has been continuing to come up in the news recently. One of the more recent stories involving him was when the concussion doctor Bennet Omalu said that “O.J. Simpson is more likely than not to suffer from CTE… I would bet my medical license on it.” (ESPN.com news service) CTE can’t be diagnosed until someone has passed away and his or her brain can be tested for it. There are many symptoms of CTE: explosive, impulsive behavior, impaired judgment, criminality, and even mood disorders. If playing football was the reason for everything that happened with O.J. that would be a bad look for the NFL (ESPN.com news service).

The biggest breakthrough in concussion research cam after Junior Seau passed away. The former San Diego Chargers linebacker was one of the most loved and respected football players of all time. His death affected so many people and left many others in shock. Dr. Bennet Omalu was the doctor who cut open his brain after he had passed and found out that he had CTE. This was the reason that he committed suicide. Seau’s son Tyler was outraged at Dr. Omalu and began cursing him out. The affects of CTE had been affecting him for months before his passing. “Seau had become unrecognizable to those closest to him. He rarely saw his four children and frequently disappeared on partying and gambling binges, spending tens of thousands of dollars at a time.” (Fainaru) This was unlike him and people were starting to realize that he was acting funny. His wife later found him dead on their queen-sized belt with a bullet wound in his chest.

Players can only be held as responsible as the trainers who are there to make sure they are safe and educated on how to stay safe. Dr. Tamerah Hunt is a certified athletic trainer and is part of the concussion program at Ohio State University. When asked how to convince coaches that a player must come out of the game? She answered by saying “with a concussion, it’s a gray area because there was no consistency and everyone did their own thing… You have to know your setting and the people working with you to make sure that your approach them in a manner that will work for them as well as yourself. Above all, you must be consistent.” (Hunt) The reporter later went on to ask how to tell the difference “between an athlete who has a nagging injury and someone who is hurt and wont admit it?” she responded by saying “Many athletes can play through a nagging pain, but it should be your goal to know the athlete well enough to notice changes… If a player is functionally able to do what needs to do for his sport, let him play. But if the injury, no matter how small – such as a sprained ankle – makes it so the athlete can’t run or can’t jump because of pain or even the fear of re-injury or not trusting the ankle, the player is not helping the team by trying to play.” (Hunt) It’s her job to make sure that players aren’t playing while hurting and bringing the team down. But most importantly the players need to stay safe.

Concussions’ being linked to CTE is starting to give the NFL a bad name and they are starting to get scared. Dr. Omalu was the pioneer of the discovery of CTE and the NFL wasn’t having it. “The NFL tried to discredit him. They hounded him and his wife. They actually had the FBI harass him and one of his partners. Then they pushed him out of Pittsburgh. Nearly broken, he left for California. But his study could not be refuted and the general public as well as football players started speaking up.” (Alford) His research began while studying Strong Mike AKA Mike Webster. Mike played center for the Pittsburg Steelers and was a pro bowl player for all 10 seasons he played and he went later was inducted into the hall of fame. His career was amazing but what happened after his career was very sad to see. He was homeless, living in a car, and was abusing drugs and alcohol. Many people believed that he had just been taking steroids and it was finally starting to catch up with him. Dr. Omalu was one of the few people who didn’t believe this was the case. He studied Mike’s brain and saw that his brain had taken so many hits and it was killing his brain. He was diagnosed with CTE and he was the first of many other players that Dr. Omalu has diagnosed with CTE (Alford).

Three years ago the NFL created a rule that states that each team must have a private neurotrauma specialist to be on the sidelines. On top of that they have concussion doctors high above the field and one on the field. They are their to look for players who have concussion symptoms and try to take them out of the game before it gets too serious. The neurotrauma specialists have limited power since they can’t overrule the teams doctors and trainers. So unless the trainers think the player is suffering from a concussion the neurotrauma specialists really cant do anything (Tedeschi).

ARGUMENT

Clearly both sides of the argument have compelling arguments. As a player and a fan I have seen both sides of the story. As a fan I don’t want to see the NFL change the rules and takeaway hard hits because that takes away from the game. As a player who had gotten a concussion playing I also see why we need to make the game safer.

I’ve been watching football my entire life and have seen how concussions have affected the sport. So many rules have been put in place to protect the players that have taken away form the big hits that make so many people watch the sport. The NFL isn’t the only sport that has been affected by this. The NHL has been trying to remove fights from the sport due to the injuries they cause, as someone who doesn’t really watch hockey I know that when I do its to see they players fight. Removing fighting would cause the sports to lose lots of fans. Also boxing, UFC, and MMA have had many people pitch the idea of making players wear headgear to protect themselves from head injuries. This would take away from the sport and almost eliminate knockouts from the sports.

Protecting the players is very important but it’s also very important to make sure that the game is still fun for the fans to watch. It’s very tough to find the middle ground between player safety and fan enjoyment. The NFL has tried to fine players who make dangerous hits to the heads of other players. In college football they’ve gone as far as ejecting players who hit other players in the head. The only problem with these rules is that sometimes it may look like a player is using hit helmet to hit another players helmet but it may have actually just been his shoulder. Ejecting players in college football is up to the refs and how they feel about the hit.

Many people believe that anyone who plays football will get a concussion and end up having issues with their brain. A very close friend of mine who has play football since he was in 2nd grade has never gotten a concussion. He is now a sophomore at Kalamazoo College and has yet to have a head injury. He plays defensive and offensive line and said he has never taken a hit to the head that left him feeling any type of concussion symptoms. The many serious cases of concussions leading to CTE have made many people scared about the idea of football. Last year a friend of my moms said that “football is pretty much suicide” she added that she would never let her son play the sport. I disagreed with her, many people see the news of former players passing away due to CTE and it freaks them out beyond belief. There is a chance you’ll get hurt playing football but that’s a risk you take playing any sport, football may be a little more dangerous due to the violent nature of the sport.

I have never played organized football in my life but I did get a concussion playing basketball in 7th grade. At the time I had no knowledge of concussions and apparently no one else in the gym did either. I remember back peddling down the court and for whatever reason one of the players on the other team had fell and was lying on the ground. I never saw him and none of my teammates warned me, I tripped over him ad straight onto my head. I hit my head hard but the play went on. I was down for about 10 seconds and when I got back up I started looking around very confused. I looked over at the stands and then my coach started yelling at me to get back on offense. After I couple plays I started to feel normal and the game went on like any other game. At the time I didn’t think anything of it but when I think back on it I think of how lucky I am that it wasn’t serious. If I had hit my head again I could’ve suffered very serious brain damage. This is proof that you can get a concussion doing anything, not just a violent sport.

It’s amazing how far we have come in the studying and awareness of concussions. Brain injuries aren’t anything that should be taken lightly. We need to educate young kids when they start playing sports about the dangerous and signs of a concussion. We should have all coaches got to seminars about concussion awareness and be able to see when someone is clearly concussed and be able to remove them from the game to keep them safe. The NFL has taken great strides into improving concussion awareness but they first need to admit that it’s a problem and that it’s something that can happen when you play the sport. Continuing to educate trainers and have them improve the communication between players and coaches. Its fun to watch and play any sport but when it starts to put your mental health at risk it isn’t fun.

In the last three years the NFL has taken strides in helping to prevent concussions as much as possible. With the addition of neurotrauma specialists on the sidelines and in the booths on top of the stadium they have eyes everywhere watching to make sure injured players are taken out of the game. Youth football coaches in multiple states are required to go to annual concussion seminars to make sure they are educated. Concussions can’t be prevented but they can be treated better. "I want every person who leaves this to be as healthy as possible when they leave. We all give up stiffness in knees, backs, joint pain stuff. You don't want to give you your brain." – Jeff Saturday

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